Vertigo's Thaumatropic Love

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It is commonplace to say that films not only relieve us from having to think but actually think for us. But, what thoughts! Film-viewers regularly undergo displeasure (suspense, anxiety, fright) but say they 'enjoyed the film immensely'. The exchange of pleasure for pain is geometrically engineered by the long familiar twists of the classic tropes, the double, story-in-story, time travel, and contamination of reality by the dream. These are on top of an initial figure-ground reversal, as we willingly submit to paralysis, like the bound figures in Plato's Cave, in order to 'enjoy' an animated screen. Yet, these quite radical dynamics for the most part go unnoticed. In addition to the willing suspension of disbelief required by any storytelling, the advanced technology of film production requires many additional forfeits. Non-orientation, it seems, makes the story go 'round, at the expense of our domesticated collective hysteria (Žižek 1992). Or, perhaps the latter, hysteria, is the anesthesia numbing the effects of the former, non-orientation. Like the Möbius band, closure in filmic experience comes at the cost of a twist that, as hard as we look at the literal paper strip, happens nowhere and everywhere.

Part 1: The Primal Cut, the Resulting Cloud

Accordingly, in Alfred Hitchcock's 1958 masterpiece, *Vertigo*, we first undergo a split in time that is barely noticed: what happens after the roof-top chase goes wrong can either be (1) the compressed dream of a detective, Scottie Ferguson, as he falls to his death or (2) the seemingly diegetic story of his recovery under the shadow of lingering acrophobia.[1] Which is true doesn't matter. The two options simultaneously trouble and stabilize the film.[2] But, if we didn't get our full 128 minutes we would want our money back, so we go for option two, the 'diegetic option' that tells the story of a retired police detective, a bachelor with time on his hands.

If Scottie Ferguson is dying or about to die, he has (in Lacan's trope of 'between the two deaths') forgotten about it and wishes us to do the same. His parapraxis (both forgetting and repression) will be to our benefit, since we get to enjoy the remainder of the story following the inconclusive roof-top chase. Because Scottie has 'forgotten how to die', what appears in his death-dream will replace the fall with a floating and have the structure of a cloud, whose vague atmosphere will both obscure and preserve. We must pay attention to the disorientation of this cloud, since it is key to the critical application of the geometry that has marked other such journeys between literal and symbolic death since time eternal (Lacan 1997: p. 270 ff). Ethnology hands out free road-maps for the theme of heroic descent, *katabasis*, the standardized adventure featuring the hero's inexplicable passivity (Cook 1999). This is additionally the cartography projected onto the audience of *Vertigo*, the customers sitting in the dark who will enjoy the film in silent paralysis, and (necessarily) for the film's producers intent on perfecting and exploiting this paralysis. If the signature feature of clouds is suspension of the law of gravity to the point where suspension is itself a rule, then *Vertigo* is about the falling that falls into itself. The cloud thus replaces gravity with an alternative energy, a freedom of movement annealed to a power to suspend. It is an extended, attenuated fall so gradual that we normally take it for the delight of temptations: *falling* for a lure, *falling* for a line, *falling* in love. Like the classic heroic *katabasis*, falling aims to learn something, even if it involves our disadvantage, a left-over from the standard theme of mock death. The tradition of film as entertainment continues the other tradition of the *katabasis*, that this knowledge will be a 'master signifier', content-free, a *kenosis*, a signification of nothing, a no-thing.

The cloud, like all clouds, has weather. 'And through this distemperature we see the seasons alter'.[3] Our increasingly fevered detective suffers the Real, then the Imaginary, with a Symbolic challenge at the end. The Real is given in the roof-top chase scene whose outcome will be suppressed—how *does* Scottie get off that roof? To enjoy the film from this point on, we just have to forget about the death-dream option and go for the diegetic Imaginary. This is the 'audience parapraxis' of *Vertigo*, a basic assumption that must be made, with the result that the remainder of the film will involve free-floating

signifiers that couple, split, merge, overlap, spin, and self-destruct within the artificial gravity of suspended disbelief. These will be the symptoms the audience will enjoy, but only as the command of the Other, which is the same for film as it is elsewhere, an empty structure. 'Enjoy!' is in the University position. We barred subjects—paralyzed, actually!—are the audience-as-product, $/\$$ (Lacan 2007: p. 148). Like other heroes who have trod the narrow path of the *katabasis*, Scottie is—appropriate for a detective—the Agent of knowledge as a chain of signifiers, S_2. The spy-master Elster, $/S_1$, gives Scottie a to-do list as the first form of this chain and sets up the premise of the film: 'Learn about my wife'. Given that Elster's wife Madeleine will not be the same as the 'Madeleine' Scottie follows, this task will be harder than it may seem.

Scottie must follow a woman obsessed with death, to the point of having her own list. She must follow in the tragic footsteps of her own great-grandmother, from riches, to poverty, to an early grave. Her journey is a geographical version of the list idea. Scottie thus follows Madeleine, one list made cartographic by another. What Scottie doesn't know is that both lists were calculated carefully in advance. Elster has designed a scam to make Scottie into the perfect witness at the inquest where Elster must appear to be the aggrieved husband. Elster's other name is 'Carlotta'.

The Scam and the Circuit

The over-riding structure of *Vertigo* is determined by the logic of the scam, the confidence trick, in relation to the circuit, the aim of completion and homeostasis. The aim of the scam is to complete a fraud. This is Part 1 of *Vertigo*. Part 2 involves discovering the fraud, adding another circle to the first. The film's suspense, and hence its 'cloud' of floating signifiers/symptoms, derives from the anamorphosis of the overlapping circles. As we will see, the initial circle of the scam, the second circle of discovery, and the overlap all involve non-orientation, a floating that counters natural gravity with latent suspension, which can be written as $\Updownarrow$.

Scams involve three interlocking parts: the Con(-fidence man), who invents and directs the plan and draws the first circle; the Mark, the victim placed at the target-center; and the Shill who pretends to be independent of and even an adversary of the Con but in fact is working for him. 'Shill' possibly derives from the expression, 'shilly-shally', as a fast-spinning form of 'I shall'.[4] In fact, Elster's 'wife' is his lover, Judy, coached to play the wife that Scottie is hired to follow. Madeleine, the actual wife who will be murdered, and 'Madeleine', the shill coached to fool Scottie, are the primary doubles of the plot, since they must not be allowed to appear together lest the con be discovered. Like the Roman gods Castor and Pollux, the temporary death of one balances off the equally temporary life of the other to make a circuit combining the life-or-death halves, 180°, as the relation of the doubles, 360°. The scam's circle will put Scottie in the witness chair, where he will support the evidence that 'Madeleine' has gone mad 'according to instructions'.

Elster's list (part 1a) gives way to Scottie's self-imposed duty after he rescues her from a drowning attempt (part 1b), now mixed with the ambitions of love, to accompany Madeleine as she 'wanders around'. As unaware of the scam as is the audience, Scottie does not realize that his seeming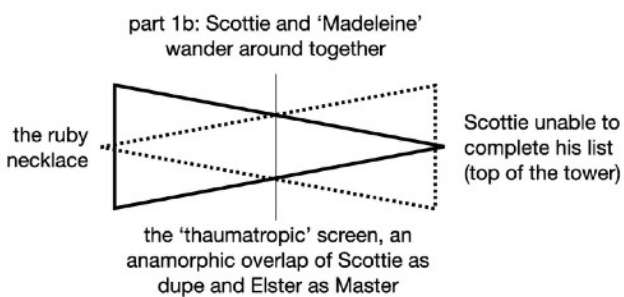ly voluntary list has been calculated in advance by Elster, whose geography will extend between the phallic marker of Coit Tower on Telegraph Hill to its antipode, the bell tower of the Mission San Juan Bautista, some ninety miles south of San Francisco. The two lists will merge in the Scottie's failure to follow 'Madeleine' to the end of her travels, literally and figuratively. In the privacy of the belfry, Elster waits with his truly murdered wife in a dress identical to 'Madeleine's'. Scottie will see a woman fall and believe her to be his true love (Fig. 1). Between part 1 and part 2 Scottie will find that the belfry murder-made-to-appear-as-suicide has

part 1b: Scottie and 'Madeleine' wander around together

the ruby necklace

Scottie unable to complete his list (top of the tower)

the 'thaumatropic' screen, an anamorphic overlap of Scottie as dupe and Elster as Master

Figure 1. The anamorphic combination of the two lists creates a double screen and two 'remainders', Scottie's inability to climb the stairs to the top of the bell tower and Judy's theft of her prop playing the haunted 'Madeleine'. The vertical line at the mid-point will crease the 360° scam to close circuit of the scam; Scottie's discovery will add another circle at the conclusion of the film.

effectively landed him in the witness chair at Madeleine's suicide inquest, closing Elster's circle. His testimony is galvanized by his shame at being unable to complete his list, all the more a 'valid list' because he has imagined that he constructed it himself. He convinces the jury, Elster escapes even mild suspicion. Scottie has a nervous breakdown and re-lives his original traumatic fall. It will take another circle, the basis of Part 2, to overlap the first 'anamorphically'. Just as the first depended on the remainder (Scottie's inability to climb to the top of the Mission tower), the second will have its own inconsistent detail, which Lacanians will be tempted to identify with the *objet petit a*, the ruby necklace that Judy has kept as a souvenir of her acting career. The anamorphic overlap of the two circles centers over a line, or rather a screen onto which is projected a double, alternating images. This is not a merger. One image eclipses/precludes another. Just as Carlotta has mandated Madeleine's death, Judy of Part 2 cannot become Scottie's lost love without herself disappearing. The dividing line between the two alternatives in both case is a line of suppression, where one signifier blocks another out of a necessity that can be discovered only in reference to a virtuality that must be substituted for the lost signifier. Unlike the virtuality that, in Euclidean space, inferentially adds hidden sides to visible ones and supplements our limited cones of vision with the illusion of a 360º panorama, this is a 'virtuality of effectiveness', a virtuality that 'makes things work'—despite our initial inability to understand what's happening (Žižek 2004).

Figure 2. Thaumatropic charm found in Laugerie-Basse, drawing by H. Cecil (Reide *et alia* 2018). As use of anamorphosis *on behalf of effectiveness*, the thaumatrope extends and deepens the idea of doubled visual presence, made famous first in the early 16c. When Lacan asks what anamorphosis was before it was anamorphosis, the thaumatrope is part of the answer.

To understand the mechanics of this virtuality, we must compare it to the 19c. commonplace toy disc that, when spun on a twisted chord held between the hands, would combine the images printed on either side. 'Thaumatropes' however have been found to be possibly the oldest moving-image machines on the planet. Examples found in Magdalenian caves in France used a single hole in the middle of the disk to make a more important

point (Fig. 2). A living animal on one side merged with the same animal, dead, on the other. The twisted chord charmed the spear to a successful future goal. The charm was spun for good luck, an automated prayer similar to the spinning of Tibetan prayer-wheels in later times. Is it not the case that all prayers are wishes 'passed off' to the (unknown desire of the) gods through the medium of automated repetition, i. e. demand?

Because the thaumatrope seems to answer Lacan's question in Seminar VII (1997: pp. 135–136), namely (paraphrasing) 'what was anamorphosis before it was anamorphosis?' What suddenly appeared in the Convent of the Minims in Paris and on the bottom of Hans Holbein's 1533 double portrait, *The Ambassadors*, opened the question generally posed in the face of any emergence (North 2004).[5] The sudden appearance of cylindrical mirrors and distorted grids must have learned their tricks somewhere else, from a broader catalog of visual, temporal, and emotional effects central to the uncanny practices of antiquity. We have to consider the prayer-disk aspect of anamorphosis to understand Judy's speech at the end of the film, to explain to Scottie how the 180º/360º circuitry of the scam that had strung him along through *a hole in the middle* and provided the virtual transfer from Judy to Madeleine was really a modern instance of ancient shamanistic anamorphosis, the 720º thaumatrope. But, we are not there yet.

Part 2: the Virtuality of Effectiveness

The harsh daylight of Part 2 exposes Judy as a tawdry shop-girl with cheap clothes and a make-do hairstyle. Her marginal resemblance to 'Madeleine' drives Scottie into an obsessional frenzy, *only* because he has not yet discovered the scam that would explain the overlapping appearances. He sees an anamorphosis as a blur rather than a thaumatrope with a fatal central void, a parapraxis forbidding one side to merge with the other without a mandatory negative vector, the Castor-Pollux rule. He believes that Judy is unknowingly fated by her accidental resemblance to Madeleine in the same way that 'Madeleine' had been unwillingly haunted by her ancestress Carlotta Valdes. He makes another list, his third, for Judy, to 'correct' her appearance and become the

woman he had loved. Neither Scottie nor the audience have a clue that Judy and 'Madeleine' are one and the same. Judy must sit in the shadow of the subjunctive uncanny, which Hitchcock colors green.

Hitchcock's signature genius for plot twists is a matter of perfect timing. The audience and Scottie arrive at the same realization at the same time—that Judy *is* 'Madeleine' *in the same way* that 'Madeleine' had been Carlotta, namely with the Hegelian twist, that A is both equal and not equal to A (Kauffman 1999; Lacan 2011). Within the depth of barbershop mirrors, the three roles of the scam, Con, Mark, and Shill, become the three theme-parts of *Vertigo*, 1a, 1b, and 2. The three lists that drove each part (Elster's instructions to Scottie, Scottie's itinerary of accompaniment, and, finally, his (obsessional) instructions for Judy's transformation) directed three circuits to complete the 180º of surveillance, 360º of accompaniment and the scam, and the 720º of anamorphic transformation and recognition. The commonalty of all three circles was their incompleteness: the failure of each list. The first list failed when Scottie rescued 'Madeleine' from drowning, the second when Scottie stopped short of the Mission tower, the third when Judy decided to wear the ruby necklace to dinner at Ernie's. The circles each list was intended to close left open a small gap. Another name for this gap is 'metaphor'.

The Vanishing Signifier, Midge

Part 2 is marked by the absence of Midge, the character who had served the function of framing and exposition so well in Part 1. Before we undertake the significance of *Vertigo*'s Part 2, we should understand what Scottie left behind. An ex-girlfriend of the bachelor detective, Midge domesticated his solitude by providing a non-confrontational home away from home. Midge holds open the place that will be filled by 'Madeleine'. This is good for the exposition business. It is Midge who encourages Scottie to tell us about his new assignment; Midge who sees the danger of falling in love with 'Madeleine', Midge who is the down-to-earth audience's down-to-earth representative. She confirms our belief that Scottie is possibly a sex-averse prude, possibly voluntarily

celibate, who sniffs at her advertising drawings of brassieres. But, she is also the Midge-too-far who paints her face in the place of Carlotta's in a mock-up of the large portrait that Madeleine had visited in the Legion of Honor Museum. Here, the character who at first was little more than an exposition device plays a key role in negotiating a delicate emotional terrain. What goes on here?

When Scottie sees the contrived portrait, he is *suddenly* revulsed. Where does this come from? She's not making a romantic play; rather, she's defending the *status quo*. This was the stand-off that Jeff and Lisa reached in *Rear Window* after their argument about the pros and cons of getting married. By over-painting Carlotta's enigmatic face with her own homey likeness, Midge reversed a figure for a ground. Her emphasis on 'the illusion side of things' struck Scottie as inflammatory: it hit a nerve he had not known to be exposed. His objective spying had already given way to curious inquiry. It took just this small push to get him (and the audience) to identify with his target. No longer a voyeur holding back in the shadows, he will be prepared to protect the spiritualized Madeleine on her next round of magic stations. He will enter into her matrix of vague associations with the confidence of a blind man who has learned where the furniture is.

Let us compare this scene to the foxtrot sequence, 'quick quick slow'.[6] Two short fast steps (negating negation, as in Freud's specifications of the logic of dreams and the unconscious) are required before a long and challenging scene can be undertaken. The quick-quick of this scene is the joke and its immediate rejection; the long scene will be the one that follows, where Scottie and Madeleine 'wander around together', incubating love and preparing for the terminal scene at the Mission bell-tower. The audience will need all the help it can get to stay with Scottie as he drowns by inches. The foxtrot move will prove the essential preparatory move. How does it work?

Madge must be eased away from the action but the audience's affective collateral must be transferred immediately. This can only be done one way, through the mechanism of parapraxis, the sudden forgetting or rather eclipsing of some term that simultaneously funds the creation of a series of floating relationships whose rules of association changes
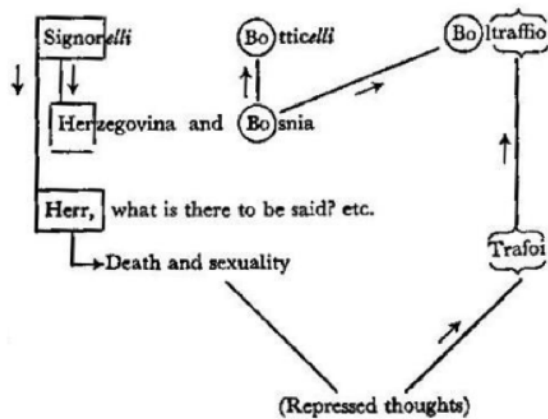
Figure 3. Sigmund Freud, the Signorelli Parapraxis (Freud 1901). The anchor, 'Signor', pulls down the whole boat ('Signorelli') with it, and all Freud can see from above the water-line is 'Herr', which he dresses in various outfits, from the sex-and-death references of respectful Turkish patients who call him 'Herr Doktor', to other artists and towns in the Upper Adige, where his ex-patient has committed suicide (self-parapraxis on account of love?).

with each new conjunction. In Freud's classic Signorelli Parapraxis, the sudden blank-out of the painter's surname led to an ant-farm-like colony of connections structured by the German translation of Signor into Herr: *Her*zegovena, *Bo*snia, *Bo*ticelli .... Freud's cloud become a fat cumulus as it expands to include Turks' fears about life being worth nothing after sex becomes impossible, Turks' respect for physicians (always calling them *Herr Doktor*), then Freud's ex-patient committing suicide in Switzerland, in a town, Trafoi, that does double duty in completing Botticelli's fellow-artist's name. (A missing piece in standard representations is *Bo*lzano, the name of the province in the South Tyrol, where Trafoi is located.)

In other words, the associations are like a watching a strange game being played in a foreign country. It is assumed that the winner and loser are zero-sum, namely that the victor will logically necessitate the loser, as in the case of parapraxis. In every game (think of chess) there are other games inside that switch the rules in the middle of the game ('gambits'). All the while Freud is rambling across the Adriatic countryside by train, running into people, seeing the sights, telling stories, all linked because *he can't remember 'Signorelli'*. The bubble held together by the tension of gambits stemming from the first moment of repression go back to the fact that Signorelli's shows his predecessor, Fra Angelico, in the lower left of the painting, *Deeds of the Antichrist*, painted 1500-04. The older painter had left Orvieto in 1447, the younger painted this scene in the Chapel of San Brizio. In the summer of 1447, Emil Krén and Daniel Marx note that Fra Angelico had painted the Prophets in one of the triangular ceiling vanes and Christ the Judge in another, a warning followed by 'I told you so'.[7] As a tribute to

the older artist, Signorelli signed his work with a self-portrait, showing him standing in front of the older painter. His image took the place of his 'rival'. Freud must have understood this as a 'paint-over' of his artistic father and allowed Signorelli's name itself to be 'painted over' through the parapraxis of forgetting.

If we do some reverse-engineering to think like Hitchcock, we must regard the bubble of loose relationships as the thing that must be allowed to exist. Held in tension thanks to their overlapping 'gambits', we have to acknowledge the preparatory function of the *latent* signifier, 'Signorelli' in the famous Freudian case, as the face of Carlotta that Midge over-paints with her own, analogous to the self-portrait of Signorelli shown standing in front of Fra Angelico. The re-purposed portrait suddenly strikes Scottie as simultaneously ridiculous and disgusting. Instead of confirming the *status quo* of his relationship with Midge, he is *forced out*. He must now occupy the cloud of overlaps, *lacunæ*, zig-zags, and dream-floating times and places as he will wander around with 'Madeleine', and we the audience must follow him around in turn, in a dream state. Our logical re-statement of this effective scene is worth setting off for emphasis:

> In order for the next (more challenging) scene to be understood, Midge, the signifier of homeyness must vanish. But, this must be a quick double negation. Midge must try to take the place of her (and Madeleine's) *predecessor*, Carlotta. This effacement, rejected, opens the way to the cloud of wobbly connections that must be made to pull the audience into Scottie's *Liebestraum*, played out over the terrain of wandering'.

It is useful to bring in a prior instance of this technique, if only to draw attention to Lacan's and Lacan's translators' need to go between the terms, 'instance' and 'agency', as in 'The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud' *versus* 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud'. The clue has to do with the letters that make the difference between, say Botticelli and Boltraffio. One blocks the other, replacing not only the meaning 'on the face of things' but the background context, i. e. Signorelli's scene of *The Deeds of the Antichrist*, sons killing

fathers. If we care about any of this, we should think of the effectiveness of Hitchcock's foxtrot, the quick-quick of double negation that sets us, the audience, up for the slow tour of Scottie and 'Madeleine' as they enter the cloud. It is the *under*-lying, the *latent* signifier, the *de-faced* signifier, which in this case is the subtle but entirely efficient thaumatrope of Carlotta/*Midge*.

A test of this proposition would be to find another case in Hitchcock where the same technique has yielded the same results. This, we suggest, can be found in a scene from *Shadow of a Doubt* (1941). The film is famous for its theme of two's. There are two Charlies. The niece refers to her uncle as a twin. They make two trips to a bar named 'Til Two, whose clock reads two to two, where the uncle orders a double brandy. *Two* detectives who have been following Charlie try to persuade her of the uncle's shady side. They pile on circumstantial evidence, piece by piece, until suddenly niece Charlie thinks of something they *have not mentioned*, because only she is aware of it. *Her uncle has been throwing around a lot of money.* This is the logic of the sorites, the paradoxical situation created by tracing back the steps of a cumulative process, such as grains of sand falling on top of each other, to certify the exact point at which the hoard became a collection, a pile.[8] This point is not to be found. Rather, the logic of sorites is that the pile *idea* is already and always 'there' because it is nowhere. It is an idea that can be realized *only through retroaction*, which arrives suddenly and without any precise logical justification. In other words, it is an emotional response. This is how the latent signifier is created by and works within metaphor, as an 'already/always'. It is present thanks to its absences, each of which is an 'instance' of the unary trait and, hence, on-stage representative of the Real.[9]

Mladen Dolar has already made this observation (1992: p. 33), but in identifying the logic as the rejection of a binary condition (the *nice* Charlie opposed to the *nasty* Charlie) in favor of a missing or latent third signifier ('money' in this film's case), the effectiveness of the sorites (the actual name of the 'one hair less', 'one grain more' phenomenon that neither Dolar nor Žižek ever mention) this otherwise admirable Slovenian philosopher misses the opportunity to gauge the utility of the foxtrot double

negation, the quick-quick that sets the stage for the slow cloud of associations the audience must be made to 'enjoy'. Midge is essential in that 'the lady vanishes'; and she vanishes because she has stood in front of 'the predecessor' just as Signorelli has stood before Fra Angelico in the paraxis of cloud formation. The ac*cumul*ation of slow travel, around the Adriatic or Northern California, will not happen unless the letter can be allowed its agencies[10], its instances, its gambits. For us to appreciate *Vertigo* as a tightly structured thaumatropic game, where each dual exists thanks to a missing third, we must not just allow but understand these gambits affectively rather than intellectually. We must *feel* their retroactive, sudden necessity.

Cloud 9

The ancient thaumatrope, with a living animal on one side and the dead on another (Fig. 2), spun by a twisted chord running through the center of the disk, corrects the modern notion that the toy is made to *combine* the two opposite images, anticipating the Ø-function illusion of motion produced by slight differences between two static frames of film. We would like to play a Lacanian joke here, and deface the idea of Ø virtuality in a literal way by arguing that the Ø is really the castrating $-\varphi$, the phallic and sometimes paternal signifier that must be absorbed into the feminized cloud of not-all elasticities. The movement image, after all, is not a mush of opposites or even differences. Difference is preserved by the neural apparatus of the audience members individually, and it is necessary that we collectivize this idea of an expanded neural network, an 'audience brain', to suggest that motion-thanks-to-difference must rely on a trans-subjective rather than individualistic model of perception (Buck-Morss 1992).

How? Why? Castration is more than castration. Žižek continually emphasizes that it's *symbolic* castration: a removal, eclipse, or repression of a literal signifier. Lacan has provided us with a model of this in his formula for metaphor, evident in the phenomenon of parapraxis, when 'Herr' takes the place of 'Signor' and thereby 'castrates' Signorelli symbolically. Possibly this is Freud's wish, to punish the upstart for

standing in front of his 'father' or at least brother, *Fra* Angelico. After all, who would have the nerve to stand in front of a brother angel?

In *Vertigo*, not only a signifier but a whole arrangement of signifiers has eclipsed a twin set. No one thinks about Scottie's death-dream hypothesis because they prefer to enjoy the show, the full-length edition of the dream, if in fact it's a dream. Like 'Signorelli', Scottie's death-dream must be subliminal, painted on the *recto* of the main story. This is the Master Thaumatrope of *Vertigo*. The spin of the yarn cannot merge the two ideas; one must castrate the other by feminizing itself, and this feminizing is done by the super-thaumatropic combinations of Carlotta, 'Madeleine', and Judy. What is more, Part 2 presents us with the challenging idea that Scottie's love is itself thaumatropic, and perhaps all love is thaumatropic, if in loving the other we love the *ágalma* that is both a part and not a part of the Imaginary being before us. Lacan says as much in Seminar VIII, *Transference* (2015: pp. 135–163, 140). What's inside that satyr-box, a jewel, is the *ágalma* of *Vertigo* inside Judy's trinket-case, a tawdry cover for a gift of truth. Where the love of Judy-made-Madeleine is an exchange of false for false, i. e. a fantasy, the love for the betrayer is sublime. Judy's final declaration of love in the last scene at the Mission tower is 'true speech'. Her love and her betrayal were simultaneous. She brought Scottie to the Symbolic end of his (passive) Imaginary *katabasis* journey between the two deaths. We cannot over-estimate the power of the penultimate scene, where we catch Scottie *as he looks in the mirror* at the reflection of the same jewel Carlotta's portrait had displayed in the opening scenes. This is the binary counterpart that effaces his reconstructive surgery of the shopgirl into the woman who finally steps out of a green cloud as his true love in the preceding scene. The jewel in the box, the *ágalma* of the love that trumps Scottie's fantasy love, depends on 'the notion of jewelry [as] not as simple as it may seem', a notion that 'one realizes right away that it can take us quite far' (Lacan 2015: p. 135).

How far? Lacan notes that '[t]he word *ágalma* appears at the very moment at which I told you the scene changes completely. After the eulogistic games regulated up until then by the topic of love, Alcibiades, the actor who changes everything, enters. The proof
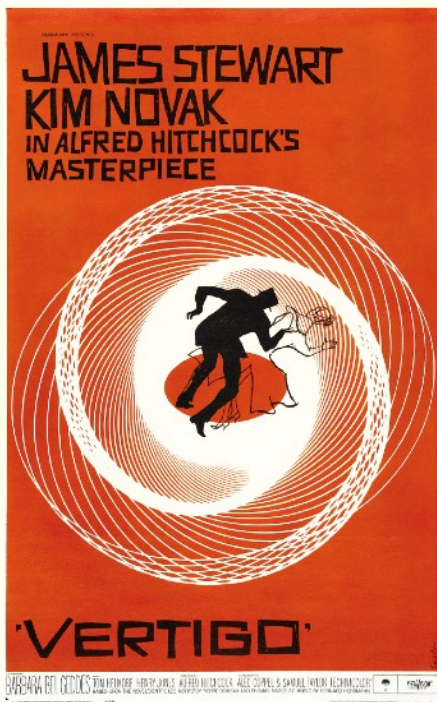
Figure 4. Saul Bass, poster for *Vertigo*, 1958. Restored by Adam Cuerden. The combination of the fallen detective and the (two) fallen Madeleines literally depicts the function of the 'figure-(to)-ground reversal' essential to the film's logic, and the logic of all scams. Bass's poster is an almost =-exact depiction of how, in a torus, two Möbius surfaces combine around a central void. Source: *Wikimedia Commons* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saul_Bass#/media/File:Vertigomovie_restoration.jpg.

that he changes everything is that he himself modifies the rules of the game, assigning himself the place of he who presides over the symposium' (2015: p. 136). The move from game to gambit is critical, and the function of parapraxis is the 'logic behind the fantasy'. This is not the Boolean logic of Venn diagrams, the abolished god of Dostoevsky who allows everything to happen, but the god of Euler, who shows overlapping circles as a union without an intersection. 'Unlike Venn diagrams, which show all possible relations between different sets, the Euler diagram shows only relevant relationships' (*Wikipedia,* 2022, January 12).[11] Lacan could not be clearer than he is in *The logic of fantasy* about the zone that Venn circles would see as logical but Euler circles would see as 'impossible' and therefore Real (2010: pp. 6–7):

But, this relation to the Other—without which nothing can be glimpsed about the real operation of this relation—is what I tried to sketch out for you as fundamental having recourse to the old support of the Euler circles. Undoubtedly, this representation is inadequate, but if we accompany it with what it supports in logic, it may be serve. What emerges from the relation of the subject to the o-object is defined as a first circle, that another circle, that of the Other cuts, the **small o** is their intersection.

It is because of this that never—in this relation of an originally structured vel which is the one in which I tried to articulate alienation for you three years ago now—that the subject can only be established in a relation of lack to this **o** which
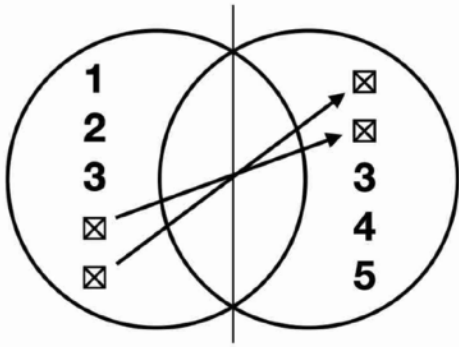
Figure 5. Symmetrical difference of the Euler circles' union without intersection is the proper model of the thaumatrope as well as the 'plot twist' exemplified by O. Henry's story, 'The Gift of the Magi' (1905), where the husband sells his watch to buy his wife combs for her hair, while the wife sells her shorn locks to buy a watch-chain for her husband. The perimeter of the central void is a pure dynamic of circulation and separation, the logic of the twin gods Castor and Pollux.

is from the Other, except by wanting to be situated in the Other, also not to have it except amputated from this **o**-object.

This is a good, accurate, technical definition of the thaumatrope, not as an animation of the animal from one position to the next, but a conversion of Ø to −φ, the conjunction of the live animal and the dead animal 'thanks to a missing third'. The two rings overlap, but the space in the middle is a void. The only way of addressing this Real is as a third, a missing element. At the level of the story, two things will 'circle' the void thaumatropically, with the rule that they never meet: (1) Carlotta and Madeleine, on account of the one being dead and the other being alive; (2) 'Madeleine' and Judy, on account of one being the role, the other the actress; (3) 'Madeleine' and the actual wife Madeleine, on account of one being the shill, the other being the murder victim. (4) Neither can the Midge of Part 1 meet the Scottie of Part 2. Their third term was abolished with the painted-over face, the metaphoric substitute of the commercial artist for the True Artist of the scam, Carlotta Valdes, the missing Mrs. who haunts the Mrs. played by the Miss: Signorelli's 'signor'. The master Mister of the mystery vanishes, the others are left with the cloud of weak elasticities that allow for gambits inside the game, the scam.

Euler emboldens Lacan to put forward the thesis of 'symmetrical difference'—another thaumatrope depending on the missing third term: 'And to consider what the product is, when two circles cut, at the level of a field described in this way, namely the union minus the intersection. This is what is called the symmetric difference' (Lacan 2011: p. 173; see also Fidaner 2021). The two circles are different. There is a living animal on the *recto*, a dead one on the *verso*. But, the middle will not be a Ø but a −φ, a *symbolic* castration that comes at the end of Scottie's death-dream and also at the end, in the

form of Judy's confession of love as a '–love'. Who understands Judy's last speech as anything other than the plea of a woman facing an execution where she will ground her own figure? What does symmetrical difference, the void of the overlapping Euler circles, mean? Symmetrical: the role of the Shill in the confidence trick; the simultaneous generation of a 'cloud' of associations with the suppression of a master signifier. Difference: the 'places' of metaphor and metonymy in Lacan's chain of signifiers in an early version of his graph of desire (2017: p. 10); the terms S/S' and S'/x separated by the • in the formula for metaphor, dividing suppression from expression (of symptoms); the energy of the spinning thaumatrope; the role of the Shill in the confidence trick. The real twins are identity and difference within the rotational mandorla around the central void (Fig. 5), the composite idea of identification (Lacan 2011), where *idem* repositions the issue the balance of the neural network that, since Freud's essay on 'The project for a scientific psychology' (1895) established homeostasis as psychoanalysis's underlying cause.

Vertigo is not simply a place to find a psychoanalytical blue-print, but a place to rediscover Lacan in the same way that Lacan lost and found himself by being a Jacques of all trades, Mastered by the no-one abiding in all of them, or as he later learned from James Joyce, the twone of the one spinning yet another yarn, a text-ile *ex falso sequitur quodlibit*. Pseudo-Scotus: *once a proposition has been asserted, any proposition, including its negation, can be inferred from it*. This is the logic of René Magritte's *Ceci n'est-pas une pipe* as well as René Girard's theory of rivalry based on semblance. For Lacan and his readers, it is the explosion of possibility in the chains of chance so miraculously preserved in fiction.

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Endnotes

[1] *Vertigo* is not the only Hitchcock film name suggesting a symptom: *Psycho*, *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Stage Fright*, *Suspicion*, *Spellbound*, *Frenzy*. The title *North by Northwest* is taken from Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* a reference to madness; *I Confess* suggests the aim of Analysis. And, what might we say of *The Lady Vanishes* or *The Man Who Knew Too Much?*

[2] Each option contradicts the other, in a circular way that uses the principle of Pseudo-Scotus, *ex falso sequitur quodlibet,* that once a proposition has been asserted, any proposition, including its negation, can be inferred from it. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Principle_of_explosion

[3] Titania, Act 2, scene 1, of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream.*

4 'A shill, also called a plant or a stooge, is a person who publicly helps or gives credibility to a person or organization without disclosing that they have a close relationship with said person or organization'. Etymology is uncertain. 'Shill', *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shill

5 Note that John North's analysis *precisely* discovers that *The Ambassadors* is actually a kind of thaumatrope. The geometry of the *recto* obliges us to turn the painting over to discover the over-determined numerics of the date of *vernissage*, April 11, 1533, 4 p.m., the exact moment on Good Friday when the sun would be 27° over the horizon of London, signaling the beginning of the Apocalypse predicted by Luca Paccioli and other astronomers.

6 Dancers will counter that the foxtrot is actually slow, slow, quick, quick. 'The slow steps use 2 beats of music and the quick steps use one. The slow steps are long and elegant, and the quick steps are short and energetic. As already mentioned, the music is played in 4/4 timing' ('Dancing for beginners', https://www.dancing4beginners.com/foxtrot/). The Lacanian foxtrot encounters the logical element retroactively. The aim is to quicken (= enliven) what would otherwise be a long filmic event, and the preparation for this must happen without being noticed as a logical antecedent. Though experientially second, the quickness *of* the logical preparation, its double negation, will be retroactive, as in the case of sorites. The foxtrot also enables a square structure to look circular (the waltz), i. e. the logic to be emotional.

7 This reference can be found at https://www.wga.hu/html_m/s/signorel/brizio/index.html

8 For a introduction to this term, see 'Sorites'. (2022, March 13). *Wikipedia*. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sorites_paradox

9 It is time for Žižek and Dolar to remember and report the actual name of this function: 'sorites'. The 'one grain more' and 'one hair less' short-circuits the scholarship that would lead to Lewis Carroll's *Logic* (1977), where the sorites is presented in the form of the 'Amos Judd' puzzles.

10 Bruce Fink (2002: p. 807) explains in his 'Translator's Notes': *Instance* (Instance) can take on virtually all of the meanings of 'instance' in English (urgent or earnest solicitation, entreaty or instigation, insistence, lawsuit or prosecution, argument, example or case, and exception); in addition, it can mean authority as well as agency (it is used, for example, to refer to Freud's agencies, *Instanzen*, the ego, id, and superego).

11 The author of the *Wikipedia* entry (January 12, 2022) elaborates in the 'clarification' section: 'The intersection of the interior of a collection of curves and the exterior of the rest of the curves in the diagrams is called zone. Thus, in Venn diagrams all zones must be present (given the set of curves), but in an Euler diagram some zones might be missing.' Lacan specifically highlights the status of the zone of overlap, 'union without intersection', in *Seminar XIV*, *The logic of fantasy* (2010: pp. 6–7). Calum Neill (2013) notes that '[t]he subject seeks *objet petit a*, but what it seeks can never be found because it never was something to be found'. In other words, Scottie's condition is *always* thaumatropic, *always* soretic, *always* a condition of retroaction that creates symmetrical difference'.